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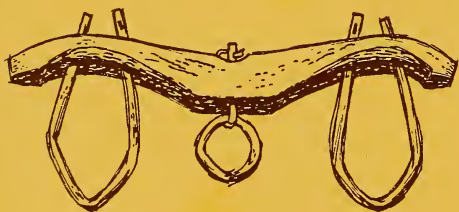
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Abraham Lincoln, The Great Anti-
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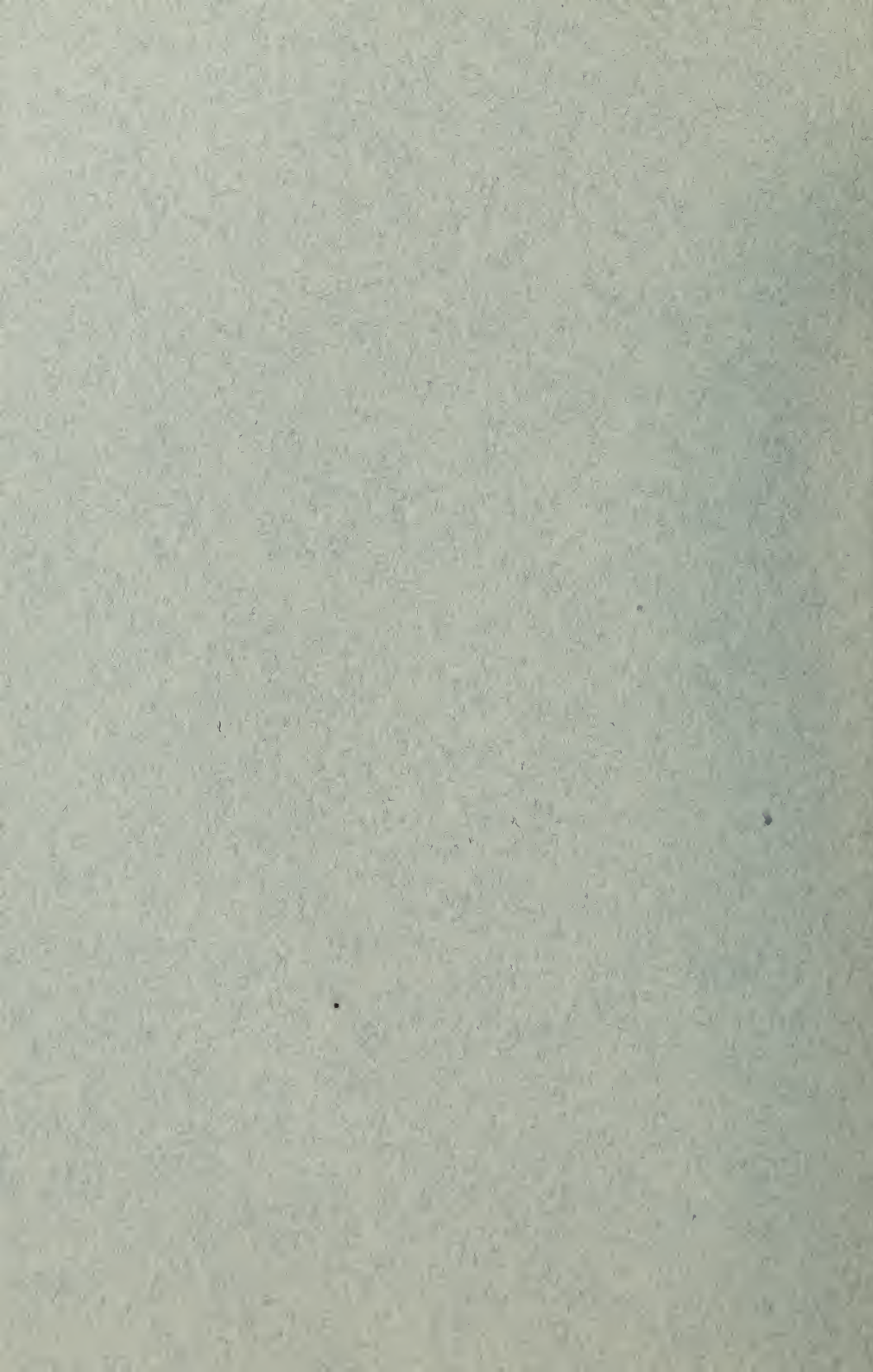
Abraham Lincoln

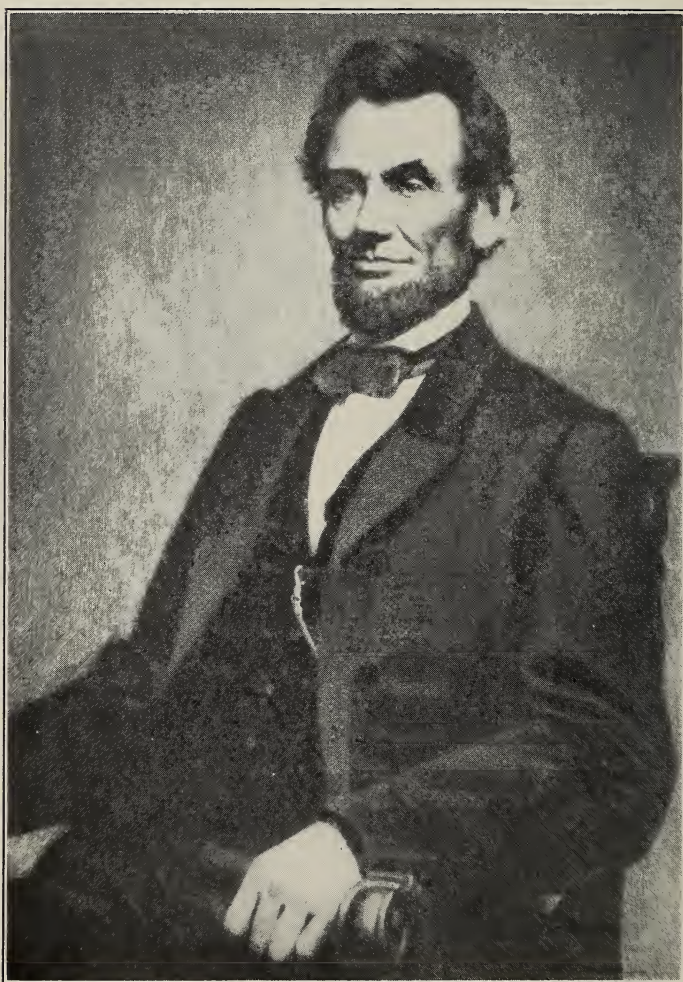
*The Great Anti-Climax after the Whirlpool
of Political Vicissitudes*

By

EMANUEL HERTZ

*Delivered at the Republican Union on the
5th day of February, 1929*





ABRAHAM LINCOLN

ABRAHAM LINCOLN; THE GREAT ANTI-CLIMAX AFTER THE WHIRLPOOL OF POLITICAL VICISSITUDES

By
EMANUEL HERTZ

(Delivered at the Republican Union on the 5th day of February, 1929.)

VERY few of the records of the great lives disclose a chain of events which were all calculated to retard, if not discourage, the hero, but which in the end—when viewed in retrospect—all become indispensable to the final success of the man—and without which the final anti-climax, the transition from defeat and depression and discouragement to victory, vindication and immortality could not have been possible. The usual course of events with all of the great military men, with all great statesmen, is that youthful ability and precocity are carefully developed, matured and trained; the boy steps from youth and early manhood and middle age, step by step, advancing each time, until he finally blossoms out into maturity much as had been planned and prepared by parent and teacher. The younger Pitt is a case in point; prepared from earliest youth for statesmanship—so that at the first appearance in Parliament he was not only a chip of the old block but was the whole block—the elder Chatham—and William Pitt's problem was hardly on par with Lincoln's. No other known world figure began with the dismal surroundings, the hopeless handicaps of Lincoln's early life and young manhood. The biographers and Lincoln students are all agreed that he had no schooling, no education to speak of. But upon close examination, we find that he had an education all his own—such as few people ever had—and in his way it was thorough, just as everything he did or said or planned was thorough. If he had imbibed nothing besides the Bible, which he studied as he studied few other books, he picked the one

volume in this world through which we may obtain a glimpse into eternity.

And so his education, instead of coming from schools or from books exclusively—and he knew Bunyan and Shakespeare and Burns almost as intimately as he knew the Bible—came from his contact with men and women and children, and his training for after life came from his dealings and association with them. These few books, in time, had influenced his style of speaking and writing: they made his speech clear and brief and pungent and so inevitable in his force and effectiveness—"for it is with words as with sunbeams—the more they are condensed the deeper they burn."

He was always roaming and seeking his brethren like Joseph—for like Joseph the Dreamer—he was gentle and a dreamer. He was always talking to and with people, old and young, rich and poor, farmer or laborer, lawyer or doctor or judge; forever discussing the problems of the day—whether it concerned the country or the township, the state or the nation, whether it was a local campaign or a state or national campaign—Lincoln was ever in the midst of it—hearing opinions and giving his own. The jurymen in the Circuit knew him, so that no jury could be empanelled but he called some of them by their first names. He read all the newspapers available and read them aloud—and gathered and garnered in all the facts and information he needed in order to organize his mind for the one great effort of his life. He wrote a multitude of letters to those whom he could not reach in person—one often wonders, had he had one of our modern vehicles—whether a single individual in Illinois would have escaped his notice. He just seemed to be ever hungering for contact with his fellowmen—as none other of his contemporaries was.

After thirty years of such continuous work and wanderings, he knew the common people, he understood them and they understood him. Like Ticho Brahe in his watchtower, following and watching the stars and studying their courses and recording his observations and preparing the figures and the charts during an entire lifetime in order to trace the courses and learn the movements of the heavenly bodies and leave his mass of information to posterity for ultimate use and enjoyment by those who would follow—so this unique brain

of Lincoln's prompted him to see and speak to as many people, on as many occasions, as time and strength permitted, in order to store up material and information and experience for what was to follow. He did not study the people by glancing at them from the window or from the cloistered heights of the superior scholar, or exalted position of the statesman—he lived with them and among them, and communed with them for thirty years. And when the time came the people knew him as they did not know the austere Washington, the political philosopher Jefferson, the scholarly Madison, or the rough and ready frontiersman Jackson, and in Lincoln's case they were solidly behind him and he constantly kept in step with the great multitude of his fellows. He never misunderstood them nor they him. And so it was that he developed a sense of knowing men and women of all stations in life when he met them. He divined their thoughts, he judged unerringly their sincerity, he appraised their abilities, he placed them in accordance with their special gifts; he pitted against one another the proper antagonists, he chose the proper instruments, and guided his people all through the vortex of civil strife—as none other could do—and though the times tried men's souls as never before, no other leader came to the surface during that period of storm and strife, and no one showed any such qualifications of leadership as he possessed. And having known want and distress and humility and obedience, when he came to power he knew how to command without irritation, he knew how to obtain the desired end without coercing or forcing anyone. And he was the first to make amends if in the wrong—or if mistaken. "You were right," he says to Grant, "and I was wrong," even as he urged Meade to follow and pursue Lee, "if you succeed yours will be the glory; if you fail, I'll assume the responsibility."

"The phatos of the Lincoln story," says Henry Watterson, "is nowhere more poignant than in those passages which represent him bravely facing the enemy in the field whilst enduring the nagging of those restless friends in the Congress and in the press, who thought they knew better than he did how to conduct the armies and fight the battles." And then he had to meet the disloyalty of thousands in the North, and to deal with all the counsels of fear and incompetency; and worst of all was the disloyalty, the cowardice and the im-

becility of those who should have upheld his arms—but did all in their power to bring about his fall. And yet he prevailed as though he had been at the head of a united and enthusiastic people, as though he had an enthusiastic and victorious army, as though he had been opposed by an inferior and divided opposition. Have we not something extraordinary in this career? Was not God with him?

The swinging of the pendulum at Gettysburg alone should be sufficient to convince us that human effort alone, that human endeavor alone could never have saved the Union. All pointed to the victorious climax of Lee's strategy. Never was army, never were officers more confident. Never was strategy more flawless—a foregone conclusion—than was this modern instance of carrying the war into Africa. Knowing his opponents, knowing the capacity of the army and knowing his own men, his own staff, Longstreet, Pickett, Stuart and the others—and it was a certainty that after the first collision the Union army would be smashed and fall apart—the Confederacy would be a fact—how else could it turn out—from the rout at Bull Run, it was one succession of victories for Lee and his armies at the seven days battle, at Fredericksburg, at Chancellorsville and at a score of other clashes, Lee was doing just what he pleased with his opponents. But thus far he was fighting men, flesh and blood, led by inexperienced officers. At Gettysburg things began to happen that cannot be accounted for in the ordinary way. True, Jackson was dead—but here was Lee with his seasoned army practically winning the fight on the first day—and again winning it on the second day—but somehow no advantage was taken of the series of superb attacks; at the crucial moments re-enforcements were missing, support withheld, advantages were not followed up—and Longstreet took sixteen hours to obey an order, to attack; and Stuart took it into his head to go off on a foraging expedition, his favorite occupation, and was lost for five days. For the first time, Lee's army was completely bedevilled and bewildered—working at cross purposes, giving the Union army time for readjusting its assignments, changing its movements, for realignment of divisions, for re-enforcement of shattered regiments, and finally twenty-four hours to prepare the spot where Pickett's charge was to be stopped and his men annihilated! Lee had lost his arm in Jackson and his eye in Stuart and his power to attack in the

stubbornness of Longstreet—who refused to unleash Pickett and his men until it was too late—until Meade had taken the final step which made Union victory inevitable. And Lee had distinctly and explicitly ordered Longstreet to attack as soon as it was light enough for forming his troops; and he finally ordered the attack at four o'clock in the afternoon. Fortune had smiled on the army of Northern Virginia for the past year; and success seemed beyond the shadow of a doubt; but the day Stuart started on his raid and got lost, the smile of fortune changed to a frown that only deepened as the campaign progressed. Every step that Lee took was a stumble, and every move Meade made was lucky, until it seemed as if “the stars in heaven fought against Sisera.”

Does it occur to most readers and students of Lincoln what an awful state of affairs existed in the Union army, or for that matter in the whole War Department, from Stanton down to the youngest recruit? While there was little dissension in the South, excepting only among a few leaders, in the North, strife, discord, jealousy, pervaded every branch of the service. It was a wonder, indeed, that the army of the Potomac did not succumb—first by the bewildering coming and going of enlisted men—then, if for no other reason but that their officers were constantly at each other like a pack of wolves—Lincoln sympathizing with Scott's age and infirmities, and substituting McClellan whom he never liked. McClellan and McDowell ridiculing Scott; McDowell charging Patterson with being an imbecile for letting Johnson leave the Valley; Banks kicking Shields; Fremont cursing Milroy; Pope villifying McClellan; Fitz John Porter dismissed in disgrace; Burnside defaming Franklin; Hooker declaring that Burnside was insane; McClellan, the organizer of the army, practically under arrest at Trenton; Pleasanton, the greatest cavalry leader of the North, who from the hour he took the mounted force in hand the Union cavalry began to meet their opponents upon equal terms—practically kicked out of the army on account of his politics; Grant abused as a drunkard. Butler and Admiral Porter were at daggers' points; Sheridan disgracing Warren who was one of those few rare spirits who saved the nation at Gettysburg; and Howard and Dennis sent out and practically banished to the West; Stanton, the ablest War Secretary since Carnot, with a temper of a Thersetes, insulted all who came in contact

with him, quarrelling with and insulting Sherman—who never forgave him; growling upon President and private alike; and was cordially detested by every man who wore the shoulder straps and came in contact with the bearded lion. Here was a veritable battle of the leaders. Into this hell of war, of banal politics, of disloyalty, of racking fears, of dishonest contractors, of conspiring Copperheads, came Lincoln—strong, masterful and kindly, preaching peace and harmony and good will—and compensated emancipation.

Another inexplicable phenomenon is to be found in the fact that so few knew what Lincoln was really aiming at—what he was doing—what the ultimate objective toward which he was silently but relentlessly forging his way forward. The Party was blind, the country was stupefied. What was it that made him so adamant on one or two points—this gentle soul who wept at the sorrows of others, who was most unhappy because others suffered. Little did they know that even then he was casting, in indestrucable bronze, sanctified by hecatombs of dead and seasoned by the conflagration of the greatest war, the indestructible foundations of a perpetual Union. And, like the genius of the Renaissance who, while casting his masterpiece in bronze, threw his furniture, his chairs, his implements, his all into the fire, in order to attain his object, the perfect Perseus—so Lincoln sacrificed all in order first to save and then to preserve his Union. No one was hereafter to question the solidarity of the Union. This question he answered for all time—and sealed the deed with his life.

“Before the war,” says Henry Watterson, “we were a bundle of petty Sovereignties held together by a rope of sand; we were a community of children playing at government. Hamilton felt it, Marshall feared it, Clay ignored it, Webster evaded it. Their passionate clinging to the Constitution under the flag, bond and symbol of an imperfect, if not tentative compact, confessed it. They were intellectual progenitors of Abraham Lincoln. He made reality—what they yearned for—but could not reach. He became the incarnation of the brain and soul of the Union of which they dreamed. ‘My paramount object,’ says he, ‘is to save the Union, and not either to save or destroy slavery.’ * * * No man of his time understood this so perfectly, embodied it so adequately,

as Abraham Lincoln. "The primitive Abolitionists saw only one side of the shield, the original Secessionists only the other side. Lincoln saw both sides." And this God-inspired giant did just what the fathers failed to do—and supplied what Marshall and Jackson and Webster and Clay failed to supply—supply the constitutional rivets which made the Union indestructible—he alone wrought all that. And in and while doing so, he alienated for the time being hosts of friends—who were added to his host of enemies. For a time at least, during certain moments, during Gettysburg, during Hampton Roads, during Antietam, it seemed that the giant himself almost faltered and almost fell—but those moments passed—and he stood firmer than ever in this storm which raged on a front of a thousand miles. Here, indeed, is the miracle of the Nineteenth Century. The master-builder of a Union, as only he conceived it, in the face of a hostile world, and a potent and resourceful enemy, forging the indestructible links which united all states in the majestic central government which was tested in the melting pot of the bloodiest of internicine wars and emerged triumphant. At first the most hated of men, then the most revered—at first the most hopeless outlook, then the most remarkable realization, the most undreamed of success.

And now, how can this miracle be explained? A political anti-climax which has no equal anywhere in any land, in any age. He chanced the life of the Union amidst almost universal execration—and won not only the perpetuity of the Union—but everlasting love and commendation of an awakened and admiring world. Very simple the solution. There is only one solution. How came it that an almost solid opposition was so completely changed to almost fanatical support and blind obedience? Lincoln so shaped affairs that nothing else was possible. Congress, governors, the press, the army, the Cabinet, were in such amazing accord after Appomattox that everyone asserted that this man could do no wrong. What else could they do with this man thus vindicated? A Congress adjourned and left in his hands the reconstruction of the Union which he would have accomplished between April and December before it re-assembled. All the charges hurled against him during those four years of toil and agony—and certainly all his fifteen predecessors combined

did not suffer as much as he from hostile and heartless criticism—were completely forgotten by the millions who were ready to clothe him with such power as no ruler before him would have dreamed of assuming. Never was Washington and Jefferson and Jackson combined, adored and loved and revered and trusted as was Lincoln after Appomatox.

And then the tragedy in the theatre—no greater American tragedy is recorded—in his assassination our country suffered the greatest disaster in its history. And his modesty and humility and calmness throughout the whole long trial—like light-houses which don't ring bells nor fire cannon to call attention to their beacon light; they just shine on—and give the needed light to those who seek light—in the tempest—on the angry ocean.

And then the people awoke—their eyes were opened. Before their awe-stricken eyes this modern Elijah ascended in his fiery chariot—but like Elijah he remains with us in spirit for all time—and the loving process of canonization began. The after-glow was benumbingly universal. Is he really gone? How is it possible? Father Abraham gone? Friend and foe alike said: "Surely this was a messenger of God," and we knew it not. He could be none other. This wonder worker, this miracle performer, this burden bearer, he could have been none other than one of God's own unrewarded messengers on earth—until his work was done—then recalled by his God and Maker to celestial council above—where other tasks awaited him.

Go through the story of his simple life—the miraculous events—it just happened that he was not returned to Congress, which made him sad and despondent—his occupation for the time, at least, was gone. It just happened that he did not accept the governorship of Oregon. Mary Todd was simply adamant against his going into the distant post, and thus losing his chance of being President. Splendid political philosophy, this—for she always had faith in his elevation and did not hesitate to proclaim it. He might have been the first Senator from Oregon, had not Baker gone there and thence to the Senate—did not the restless and roving Shields represent three different states at different times in the Senate. So why not he? Was it not therefore pre-ordained that he should not go?

But it is only now that we mortals see that he would never have been considered for the Presidency had he left Springfield and Illinois. He just lost the Senatorship to Trumbull; and Trumbull remained in the Senate—he was never mentioned for the highest position; had he won he would have been disqualified by the same token, by the same inevitable contests in debate as were Seward and Chase and McLean, whose opinions were known to all who read the debates in the Senate, whose judicial opinions were open to all—and Lincoln was the most outspoken of men—you could not misunderstand Lincoln—he was clear in his utterances as the light of day. It simply could not be tolerated by an intolerant South, and a North unwilling to invite dissension, that abolition sentiment in New England and New York should dictate a nomination for President. The nominee must be a colorless man who can please all parties. That was the end of Seward and of Chase. Their political visions faded into nothingness. He just lost out to Douglas—as a result of an unholy gerrymander—his friends protested. He was truly unfortunate—he had always thought so, unfortunate in almost every important undertaking up to that time. But he spiked Douglas' guns and divided the democracy, and became the leading and successful contender for the leadership of his united party—the new Republican party. He alone could carry the border states—he alone could get the foreign vote—had he not foreseen and prepared for it? He just asked Douglas one question which Douglas was forced to answer—in spite of the united opposition of his friends who advised against his asking it—and which Douglas could not answer in any way satisfactory to North and South; after again overruling his advisors and insisting that “a house divided against itself cannot stand,” they all concluded that Lincoln's future was doomed to failure and his political ambitions were consigned to oblivion—by Douglas' monumental victory. Douglas remained in the Senate in spite of Buchanan's opposition, and in spite of the formidable opposition of Lincoln.

And then all the incidents and accidents of the War made for Lincoln, and the North and against Jefferson Davis and the South. The Southerners seemed to have been blind to their fine opportunities in the beginning of the conflict. It was then they could have won, if at all, not after the North

had sufficient opportunity to prepare—for the North outnumbered them at least three to one. Though their fine army could have taken Washington a dozen times in the beginning—but for some inexplicable reason they simply did not—Lincoln in flight could not have held out, could have had no followers—with Southern sympathizers organized throughout the North. What an irretrievable blunder was thus committed by Beauregard and Johnston in not following up the retreat after Bull Run—and Washington defenseless only twenty-six miles away—never was there a worse rout, and Longstreet was actually stopped by a peremptory order from proceeding to take the doomed city. This was but the first of many opportunities which the South had but to grasp—and the history of the new world might have been changed. But they were fighting to maintain an era that was of the past, a shiboleth which was false, and a principle of government which was ancient and inhuman.

They did not make a move in the direction of Washington until it was too late—three years later—when the South itself began to read its “Mnai, Mnai, tekel upharsin.” Jefferson Davis wrote Lee, while on his way to Gettysburg, that he would not send Beauregard to threaten Washington, nor would he send the two brigades of Pickett’s division to Lee, for he feared to uncover Richmond and leave it open to capture. This letter never reached Lee but was captured and turned over to the Washington authorities who then knew that it was safe to re-enforce General Meade with nearly all the troops which had been left to guard and protect the Capital. This revelation was one of the first blows to Lee’s plans for invasion of the North.

A similar occurrence turned the tide at Antietam—a letter of Lee’s showing his plans for that battle fell into the hands of McClellan—and for the first time in his career, the hesitating and procrastinating commander was sure of his ground in view of the information which has thus miraculously fallen into his hands—was prepared to meet every move of Jackson and of Lee—and Lee was repulsed and stopped and led his army southward in defeat. But these are not all of the miraculous occurrences. We find them wherever we look, and we must conclude that Lincoln and his men were led by the

unseen Powers, that guide the destinies of nations through the ages.

Why, with all his handicaps, did Grant, whom Lincoln discovered, forge to the front ahead of and in place of McClellan and Sherman and Sheridan and Thomas—brilliant men but lacking that something in the conduct and science of war which Douglas and Seward and Chase lacked in statesmanship? And why were Albert Sidney Johnston, the hope of the Confederacy, and “Stonewall” Jackson, the never defeated Crusader of Dixie, the former struck down just as Shiloh was trembling in the balance and even then saved only by the appearance of Buell’s army—and as Jackson, shot by his own men, was most needed for the final onslaught at Gettysburg? “Had Stonewall Jackson been at Gettysburg, I would have established the Southern Confederacy,” said Lee. At Gettysburg, Jackson was needed more than at any other place of the whole war—where Longstreet and Lee argued and disagreed and delayed, in order to give Meade the opportunity to withstand and repulse the mightiest assault of the army of which Lee said proudly: “There were never such men in any army before, they will go anywhere and do anything if properly led.” An army made up of men fresh from the battlefields of Mexico and the Indian Wars—of men whose ancestors had fought under Washington, Marion or Green and with Jackson; men trained in bold and daring adventure—heroes all. And here, too, was their beloved leader—Robert E. Lee, the superb! Had Lee advanced on the evening of the 1st of July, not even the combined efforts of every man in the North could have checked for a day the march of a veteran army of sixty thousand men—under this modern Chevalier Bayard—if ever there was one in these days. All the millions of warlike Persia could not retard the thirty thousand Greeks led by Alexander; nor could the savage hordes of Britain stop one legion of Caesars. All the militia of Indiana and Ohio could not withstand John Morgan and his three regiments of cavalymen. The occupation of Northern cities by the Confederates would have given both England and France the pretext they longed for—of acknowledging the South as belligerents.

But—“God ruled at Gettysburg,” says Dr. Hill. The Confederacy reached its high water mark at Gettysburg. At

sundown on the first day, Meade was bewildered, when a strange and irresistible impression moved him to order up his reserves. At daylight of the second day he was ready to meet the Confederate advance. He had a similar experience the second night—even planned a retreat according to the positive statement of General Butterfield, his chief of staff. "Tell me," asks Dr. Hill, "the secret of his inspiration!" Why when the destiny of the nation was at stake did he see the light in those days of darkness, by which he moved with unerring instinct of victory?" Dr. Hill takes you to the battlefield and points out a spot where on the second day Sickels was signally repulsed and almost mortally wounded. Then forces to his right were moved to his support, leaving the works and the ammunition in the rear entirely deserted. Just then Major-General Edward Johnson, the Confederate, eager, alert and defiant, swung round Culps Hill and dropped into those deserted works. As he did so he was seized by a strange fear, exclaiming, "This is a Yankee trap, a Yankee trap! We will stay here and see what comes of it." That delay was another one of the causes which lost Gettysburg to the Confederacy; Johnson staid and staid notwithstanding the fact that he was in the rear of the Union Army, that two hundred yards ahead of him was the bulk of the Union supplies—unprotected. A mere squad could have gone forward and ended Gettysburg without resistance—an army cannot fight a mortal combat without ammunition and supplies.

But no squad went forward, the supplies were not captured. The Union Army was not attacked in the rear. Why did not Johnson go forward? Explain, if you can, why he hesitated when victory was within his grasp. Why the Confederate lines were shattered the next day and Lee driven for the last time southward to defeat and final doom. Did God interpose? Ah, I find the secret yonder in the White House, where the ashen-faced, broken-hearted Lincoln pleaded and prayed, face to face with Almighty God, even as Washington prayed at Valley Forge, crying out from the depth of his anguish: "O Lord God, I have done everything I can. And now you must help! Save, or we perish!" The God of

Moses, of Joshua, of Cromwell and Wellington, of Washington and Grant, heard the agonizing cry of Abraham Lincoln and the Union was saved. 'The fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much'."

But the calendar of miracles is not yet completed. The navy had a mighty hand in throttling the Confederacy—and now witness the almost romantic performances of that part of the service. How came the three Swedes—Ericson, Dahlgren and Worden—discovered and attracted to the service by the inventive instincts of Lincoln, to construct and arm and command the little Monitor in nick of time—just as the Merrimac was smashing the very battlements of the Union, and when the bravest thought the end of the Union was at hand. And how but through the same power which sent Lincoln was it possible that Cushing was able to creep up York River in a ludicrously weak and improvised boat armed with one torpedo—and sink the second and last and mightiest of Southern ironclads? How came Lincoln to read the minds of Palmerston and Russell and Gladstone—not only during the Trent Affair—but when he anticipated the action of that Cabinet by a few days, by his Emancipation Proclamation, and thus checkmated the ablest diplomats of his day, a second time within one year.

And finally, Why Lincoln, the rustic lawyer, the rail-splitter, instead of Seward the matchless leader, or Chase the magnificent or McLean or Curtis, the great jurist—or Morton or Andrew, the great governors? Why was David preferred to Saul? The answer is as it has been often given—that he was Heaven picked and Heaven sent, reared by the same Providence that reared Luther and Columbus and Socrates and Moses. For there is a Divinity that shapes our ends, and those of nations as well.

No other man could have lived through the days succeeding Bull Run and the Trent Affair—any more than could any other but Washington have lived through the winter at Valley Forge—and survive. Without Lincoln the contest would have been abandoned at the end of ninety days. The North was becoming war-weary. "Let them go," was the universal plaint—"let the erring sisters go in peace," was the prayer of Greeley's Twenty Millions, "who cared?" Both

extremes were thus prepared—Greeley and Wendell Phillips—who was tired of the “compact with hell.” Seymour and McClellan were ready to abandon the unpopular war and ride into power on a platform that the war was a failure.

If there be any doubt that He who guides the destinies of men and nations had the Union in His keeping, from the days of Bunker Hill and Yorktown down to Gettysburg and Appomatox—the educating, the rearing and sending the humble son of Nancy Hanks to lead his people out of the wilderness and remove the shame of Egypt, stamp out treason and make the Union under the Constitution, under the Declaration of Independence, and above all, under an all-protecting Providence—eternal and everlasting—that doubt is now completely dispelled. That Lincoln was guided by Him on high, is as true as that our Redeemer liveth, and that He spread before our bewildered eyes this act of revelation in the Nineteenth Century, as in the days of old, which began on the fiery mount and has continued through the millenia to this very day and will continue throughout all time to come, whenever an eternal principle is at stake and whenever the eternal verities are assailed.

And we of today, sixty-four years after his ascent to glory—let us resolve that we will follow no leader, that we will choose no favorite, that we will tolerate none to reach the highest place in the councils of the nation who, in his private and public life, does not practice the caution, the moderation, who does not preach and practice the justice and is not actuated and guided by the patience, by the love of his fellowmen, as was this first American—Abraham Lincoln.

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